

00385

1961/03/26

Reference:-

PREH 11/3280

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

45497

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Subject
SECRET

INWARD TELEGRAM

TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

FROM THE WEST INDIES (Prime Minister's Party)

Simplex D. 26th March, 1961.

R. 27th " "

07.30 hrs.

EMERGENCYTOP SECRET AND PERSONAL

Unnumbered

PRIME MINISTER

PERSONAL TELEGRAM

TRACK No. 6.

SERIAL No. T.178/61

Addressed London.

Repeated Washington and Bangkok

(Colonial Office please pass all Emergency)

Personal for Secretary of State.

Following for de Zulueta, Admiralty House,
from Bligh.Please pass following Personal message to
Home Secretary from Prime Minister.

Begins.

You will have seen my telegram to Foreign Secretary and the record of my conversation with President Kennedy. In view of the time difference between London and Bangkok it is most urgent that the cabinet should consider the views outlined in my message to Foreign Secretary and let him know as soon as possible whether they are prepared to support them. I should be grateful if you would send him a telegram direct with a copy to me.

I was much struck by the realism with which the President regarded the situation in Laos. There can be no question of the Americans seeking to launch an unlimited military adventure. He shares our view of the military position but he feels that if SEATO were to turn a deaf ear to a plea for help from the king the whole of South East Asia might be dealt a mortal blow - and indeed the rest of the world might suffer grievously. The President felt strongly that it would be very difficult for the United States to take military action alone even as an agent or under the aegis of SEATO. He thought there would be a large body of opinion in the United States who would regard active, if limited, British support in this matter as the determining factor. If this were to be withheld he was not sure he could get his people to accept unilateral action by the United States. I am not quite sure whether this is true. The Americans might in the last resort act alone. But if we refused even a limited military contribution I think our influence with them would be much impaired. I made it clear to the President that if we were to agree to any military support for an operation by or under the aegis of SEATO it would have to be of a limited nature. The main effort must be American. He accepted this.

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SECRET

In effect this whole operation would amount to holding certain bridgeheads on the Laotian side of the river which may serve (1) to release royal Laotian troops to fight the Pathet Lao if they are disposed to do so and (2) to protect Thailand while position of some strength is being built up there.

I still think it is a choice of risks. On the whole, judging from past experience, it is best to make a stand before it is too late and everything crumbles.

Certainly the new President has a clear grasp of essentials and seems very appreciative of the British position in world politics and of what he refers to as our partnership.

(Copies sent to Foreign Office for repetition to Washington and Bangkok)